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AUTHOR Avery, Robert K.
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ABSTRACT

Results of a 1977 suvey of brcadcast research coursework in higher education revealed that less than 50% of the institutions responding were teaching any of seven identified broadcast research topics. This study, a follow-up of the 1977 survey, sought to ascertain how research topics are treated in the undergraduate curriculum and to assess the extent of separate research units in the introductory broadcasting course. Response to three-page questionnaire yielded 129 usable responses. Conclusions from the study support these 1977 suvey findings: research is being taught as part of courses (rather than as a separate couse) at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and most universities are not teaching research in their undergraduate programs. In addition, results of this study show that less than one-third of the introduction to broadcasting courses contain a separate unit devoted to broadcast research, that broadcast educatcrs rank research as least important in content area, and that introductory courses that focus cn broadcast research subjects appear to give students an academic advantage in more advanced research oriented courses. (MAI)

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Department of Communication

University of Utah

TEACHING RESEARCH IN THE INTRODUCTORY BROADCASTING COURSE: A SURVEY OF THE FIELD

by

Robert K. Avery
Associate Professor

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert K. Avery

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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INTRODUCTION

The appropriate role of broadcast research in the mass communication curriculum has been a topic for debate ever since courses in radio programming and performance started to filter into the academic schedules of speech and journalism departments. Although a theoretically-based broadcasting curriculum, which would be considered respectable by deans of liberal arts, humanities, and social and behavioral science, did not really appear until the flood of communication doctorates in the 1960s, contributions by such key figures as Paul Lazarsfeld, Frank Stanton, Joseph Klapper, and Wilbur Schramm had laid the foundations much earlier.[1] The functions of research training in the broadcast curriculum continued to receive increased attention by educators, and by 1974, Bittner had published an essay which provided strong arguments for research-oriented coursework in the undergraduate curriculum.[2]

At the 1977 annual meeting of the Broadcast Education Association, Philpcrt and Balon reported on a survey of broadcast research coursework in higher education.[3] Utilizing the dimensions of research training outlined by Bittner, Philport and Balon attempted to determine the extent to which courses devoted to broadcast research were included in both undergraduate and graduate programs across the country. In general, the findings revealed that less than fifty percent of the institutions responding to the survey were teaching any of the seven research dimensions identified by Bittner. Of

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those respondents who were teaching research-related subjects, most were incorporating the discussions into existing courses other than separate research offerings.

THE STUDY

This paper serves as a follow-up to the Philport and Balon survey. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to ascertain how broadcast research topics were treated in the undergraduate curriculum, and to assess the extent of separate research units in the introductory broadcasting course.

Following the procedures adopted for the original survey, the population for this study was the 206 institutional members of the Broadcast Education Association listed on the inside front cover of the Journal of Broadcasting (Fall, 1977). A three-page questionnaire designed to meet the objectives of the survey was mailed during the first week of January, 1978. A second wave of questionnaires was sent to those who had not yet responded by Monday, February 13, 1978.

RESULTS

Of the 206 institutions surveyed, a total of 137 questionnaires were returned, yielding a return rate of 66.5%. Dividing the questionnaires into three categories, which were labeled two-year community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities, the resulting proportions were as follows:

	Total Responses	%	Usable Responses	%
Community Colleges	16	11.7	14	10.9
Four-Year Colleges	11	8.0	10	7.7
Universities	110	80.3	105	81.4
Totals	137	100.0	129	100.0

The number of usable questionnaires represented a 62.6% response rate which was heavily weighted toward universities. This is a function of at least two factors. First, the proportion of BEA member institutions which can be described as universities is clearly dominant (76.2%). Secondly, a preliminary screening of the questionnaires revealed that most of the community and four-year colleges which responded to the survey do not focus on research topics in their introductory broadcasting or mass communication courses. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that some institutional representatives failed to respond simply because they did not feel that they had anything substantive to contribute. One community college respondent who did take the time to write expressed himself in the following manner:

> Our two-year program is a practical approach in an attempt to turn out students who are willing to work at low pay in local radio stations. We must leave the research to larger schools with more money and time. You are insisting that I fill in a form for your research project to point out our own weakness in one area. No thanks!

Since the data generated by the study were dominated by university respondents, no further attempt was made to provide comparisons on the basis of institutional type. Instead, the data were pooled, and interpretations were guided by the fact that the results are far more representative of university course offerings than those found in small colleges.

Type of Introductory Course

The 129 usable questionnaires were next grouped according to responses to Item #3, the type of introductory course offered at each institution. This classification procedure resulted in three major categories:

	#	%
Introduction to Broadcasting - Theory Oriented	91	70.5
Introduction to Broadcasting - Production Oriented	16	12.4
Introduction to Mass Communication (Broad Survey)	22	17.1

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents (70.5%) described their introductory course as being theory-oriented, whereas 12.4% of the respondents stated that their introductory course focused on topics including radio-television production, announcing, and script writing. About seventeen percent of the institutions represented by the survey did not offer a separate introductory course which deals solely with broadcast-related topics. In such cases, courses identified as "Introduction to Mass Communication," "Mass Media in Society," and "Survey of the Mass Media" provide an historical and structural overview of all media systems, including radio and television. Representative textbooks used in these courses include Agee, Ault and Emery, Introduction to Mass Communications; Bittner, Mass Communication; Hiebert, Ungurant and Bohn, Mass Media; Pember, Mass Media in America; and Sandman, Rubin and Sachsman, Media. These courses are generally offered each quarter or semester, and generate enrollments in excess of one-hundred students.

By contrast, the introductory broadcasting courses which exhibit a production or operations orientation provide a wide range of enrollments, from fifteen students to more than sixty per section. The vast majority (81.3%) however, reported figures totaling forty or less. Of the questionnaires falling into this general classification, only one (6.3%) indicated that the course outline contained a separate unit on some facet of broadcast research. In this single instance, the focus was on understanding data

provided by rating services, and their usefulness for sales, promotion, and program decision-making. The textbooks most frequently associated with these courses include Hilliard, Radio Broadcasting; Johnson and Jones, Modern Radio Station Practices; Oringel, Audio Control Handbook; and Zettl, Television Production Handbook.

Pooling the questionnaires which identified production-oriented broadcasting or broad survey-oriented mass media courses resulted in a total of ten (26.3%) courses which contained at least one class session devoted to broadcast research topics. In virtually every instance, the topics (audience measurement, demographic analysis, psychographic testing, ascertainment, and program ratings) are presented in a lecture-discussion format with no attempt to engage students in research projects outside of class. Only one respondent (2.6%) indicated that students were required to prepare a research paper which was keyed to the topics discussed. Overall, the course comprising these two classifications provide minimal opportunity to develop a significant understanding of content related to broadcast research.

Introductory Broadcasting Courses - Theory Oriented

As noted earlier, the majority of courses (70.5%) described by respondents could be described as introductory broadcasting courses with a theoretical orientation. Since these courses not only constitute a significant portion of the data collected, but appear to be most consistent with the objectives of this study, responses are discussed below in considerable detail.

To begin, the titles used most often to identify courses in this category include "Introduction to Broadcasting," "Elements of Broadcasting,"

"Fundamentals of Broadcasting," "Introduction to Radio and Television," "Broadcasting in America," and "Broadcast Communication." These courses are schedu'ed anywhere from less than once a year to four times each year with multiple sections, but most appear to be scheduled an average of two or three times:

	#	%
Less than once	1	1.1
Once each year	19	21.0
Twice each year	35	38.5
Three times each year	29	31.8
More than three times	7	7.6

Enrollment in the introductory broadcasting course is also quite variable, but responses indicate a concentration of large classes:

	#	%
20 or less	6	6.6
21 to 40	29	31.9
41 to 60	22	24.2
Over 60	34	37.4

Perhaps a more significant or revealing characteristic is the textbook which is used. While the quality of instruction can vary widely from one class to another (even within the same institution), the choice of textbook is a helpful guide to understanding the priorities established for the course. Of the 91 questionnaires used for this tabulation, 23 (25.3%) identified two or more required textbooks; 64 (70.3%) cited a single title; and four (4.4%) indicated there was no required text. Table I provides a summary of the textbooks which were identified by three or more respondents. Without question, the most frequently mentioned text was Head's Broadcasting in America (Third Edition). A distant second place went to Chester, Garrison

TABLE I

INTRODUCTORY BROADCASTING TEXTS RECEIVING THREE OR MORE MENTIONS

Author/Title	#	%
Head, Broadcasting in America	52	57.1
Chester et al, Television and Radio	12	13.2
Robb, Communications Coursebook	8	8.8
Smythe and Mastroianni (eds.), Issues in Broadcasting	5	5.5
Foster, Understanding Broadcasting	4	4.4
Broadcasting Magazine	4	4.4
Brown, Television: Business Behind the Box	3	3.3
Kahn, Documents in American Broadcasting	3	3.3
Lichty and Topping (eds), American Broadcasting	3	3.3
Summers and Summers (1st Edition), Broadcasting and the Public	3	3.3

- Number of times cited on the 91 questionnaires categorized as "introduction to broadcasting - theory oriented.

%- Proportion of the 91 questionnaires containing this title.

and Willis' Television and Radio (Fourth Edition), and the third place position was filled by Robb's Television/Radio Age Communications Coursebook. Perhaps the most interesting finding to be derived from this item was that Foster's Understanding Broadcasting was cited four times (4.4%). Given that this text was released less than one month prior to the mailing of the survey instrument, its appearance as an adoption at all must be considered significant. This interpretation is supported by the fact that four other respondents explicitly stated that they were planning to adopt the Foster text. Of interest to this report is the additional fact that Head's Broadcasting in America contains two chapters which focus on broadcast research: Chapter 13, "Audience Measurement," and Chapter 23, "Mass Communication Research and Theory." Foster's Understanding Broadcasting contains one research-related chapter: Chapter 10, "Ratings." Neither the Chester et al nor the Robb editions provide separate chapters focusing on broadcast research topics.[4]

A nearly balanced positive/negative response rate was generated by the question, "Does your course outline contain a separate unit on some facet(s) of broadcast research?" Forty-four (48.4%) respondents answered "yes," and forty-seven (51.6%) answered "no." Of those providing a positive response, the number of class sessions devoted to the unit on broadcast research was described as follows:

	#	%
2 or less	21	47.7
3 to 5	20	45.5
6 to 8	3	6.8

Of the 47 respondents who stated that their course did not contain a separate research unit, 17 or 36.2% indicated that an effort was made to integrate broadcast research topics into other content areas. For example, discussions of the social and psychological effects of electronic communications draw heavily on findings of broadcast researchers. Similarly, discussions surrounding programming and program scheduling make reference to audience data and the methods for obtaining it. Some respondents explained that lectures dealing with programming and audiences necessarily touch on the relative strengths and weaknesses of commercial rating methods and the application of the resulting data to decision-making. Lectures on economics (advertising), ascertainment, and public opinion frequently include specific discussions of research methodologies. Several respondents also mentioned that their units on broadcast criticism often made reference to original research which supported various points of view.

Returning to the 44 questionnaires which identified a separate unit on broadcast research, the responses were categorized according to the primary focus of the unit. This analysis resulted in the following breakdown:

	#	%
Program Rating Research	20	45.5
General Research Unit Containing Variety of Research Topics	14	31.8
Social/Psychological Effects	4	9.1
Emphasis Not Given	6	13.6

Nearly half of the respondents (45.5%) cited program ratings as the primary emphasis of the research unit. Topics listed included such headings as sampling theory, need for audience measurement, definition of research

terminology, specific audience research methods, professional rating firms (Arbitron, Nielsen, Pulse), how advertisers use ratings data, and utilizing audience data to make programming decisions.

Of those respondents who identified a more general research orientation, "ratings" was almost always included as one of the topics. However, in addition to ratings, these broadcast educators indicated that attention was also given to such subjects as the application of the scientific method to broadcast decision-making, research ethics, historical and other descriptive research methods, introduction to inferential statistics, utilizing statistical packages, role of psychographic methods, relating research data to pragmatic concerns, and careers in broadcast research. Some respondents stated that their lectures closely paralleled the topics outlined in Head's chapters 13 and 23.

Those individuals citing social and psychological effects as the primary focus of their research unit revealed a greater emphasis on communication theory. Topics included theories of mass communication, analysis of effects research, sociological impact of broadcasting, and man's electronic environment.

Again, looking at those courses with a unit on broadcast research, 18 or 41.0% require students to engage in one or more research projects outside of class. Such projects frequently included a summary report, but should not be viewed as "academic research" in the sense of a traditional library-supported term paper. (Projects meeting this latter description were found to exist in all course categories.) Examples of original research projects which were cited by respondents include the following descriptions:

a) Conduct audience surveys for local radio stations.

b) Replicate professional survey (Arbitron, Pulse) of market area and compare the results.

c) Conduct telephone opinion poll of program preferences and attitudes toward specific questions.

d) Conduct general ascertainment survey and compare problem priorities with local stations.

e) Research teams make an analysis of local stations' public files, and provide group reports to class on their findings.

f) Monitor local radio and television station programming and prepare market profiles; follow with in-depth interviews with program managers.

g) Develop media inventories for various demographic groups through the use of in-person interviews.

h) Perform content analysis of issues presented on various types of programs, including talk shows, news programs and documentaries.

i) Conduct mini laboratory research projects to illustrate media effects.

j) Conduct opinion survey of station managers on variety of broadcast topics.

k) Participate as subjects for faculty and graduate student research projects (required of all students).

l) Using existing data, prepare and defend a detailed market analysis for a real or hypothetical station.

Broadcast Research in Context

All respondents were asked to rank seven content areas according to their perceived importance for the introductory broadcasting course at the institution being represented. Converting the responses to weighted rankings, with seven points awarded to the most important area and one point assigned to the least important, tabulations were completed for the three general course classifications: introduction to mass communication,

introduction to broadcasting-production oriented, and introduction to broadcasting-theory oriented. Tables II, III and IV summarize the mean rankings assigned by the respondents in each category.

As might be expected, the perceived importance was consistent with the general course descriptions and orientation, with the two categories which represent a more theoretical orientation providing the greatest similarity. Respondents representing the production-oriented broadcasting course ranked "Radio/TV production" as most important (1), whereas the other two sets of respondents ranked it last (7). However, the consistently low ranking assigned to "Broadcast research" was even lower than expected. The research content area received rankings of 6, 7 and 6. When the individual rankings were collapsed across all three groups, "Broadcast research" dropped to seventh position, thus representing the least important content area in the introductory broadcasting course (See Table V).

CONCLUSIONS

The survey by Philport and Balon arrived at two major conclusions: (1) Research is being taught as part of courses (as opposed to separate courses) at both the undergraduate and graduate levels; and (2) most universities are not teaching research in their undergraduate programs.

The findings of the present study provide additional support for these conclusions. Less than one-third of the courses which serve as an introduction to undergraduate broadcasting sequences contain a separate unit devoted to broadcast research. Even when the courses which attempt to integrate broadcast research topics within other discussions are added to the list, the aggregate is less than one-half (45.0%) of the introductory

TABLE II

MEAN RANKING OF CONTENT AREAS FOR THE INTRODUCTION TO MASS COMMUNICATION COURSE

Content Area	Mean Score	Rank
Broadcast history	4.27	4
Industry structure/economics	6.14	1
Radio/TV programming	4.00	5
Broadcast regulation	4.59	2
Ethics and criticism	4.45	3
Broadcast research	2.82	6
Radio/TV production	1.72	7

TABLE III

MEAN RANKING OF CONTENT AREAS FOR THE INTRODUCTION TO BROADCASTING COURSE - PRODUCTION ORIENTED

Content Area	Mean Score	Rank
Broadcast history	3.62	5
Industry structure/economics	4.54	3
Radio/TV programming	5.15	2
Broadcast regulation	4.08	4
Ethics and criticism	2.54	6
Broadcast research	1.93	7
Radio/TV production	6.15	1

TABLE IV

MEAN RANKING OF CONTENT AREAS FOR THE INTRODUCTION TO BROADCASTING COURSE - THEORY ORIENTED

Content Area	Mean Score	Rank
Broadcast history	4.96	3
Industry structure/economics	5.94	1
Radio/TV programming	4.29	4
Broadcast regulation	5.01	2
Ethics and criticism	3.46	5
Broadcast research	2.24	6
Radio/TV production	2.09	7

TABLE V

COMPOSITE RANKING FOR ALL RESPONDENTS TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Content Area	Mean Score	Rank
Broadcast history	4.69	3
Industry structure/economics	5.82	1
Radio/TV programming	4.33	4
Broadcast regulation	4.83	2
Ethics and criticism	3.54	5
Broadcast research	2.31	7
Radio/TV production	2.47	6

courses represented by this survey.

More support for the position that broadcast research enjoys a very limited treatment in the introductory course is found in content rankings of broadcast educators. Compared with broadcast history, structure and economics, programming, regulation, criticism, and production, broadcast research is considered to be the least important content area.

The contrast between course outlines which provide a detailed research unit (three sessions or more) and those containing no research emphasis is striking. Those few courses which have included the opportunity for original research projects outside of class show evidence of affording a basic foundation for more advanced research-oriented course offerings. While the majority of departments apparently subscribe to the philosophy that broadcast research should be treated at the intermediate and/or advanced levels of the undergraduate curriculum, those introductory courses which are carefully focusing on broadcast research subjects would appear to be giving students a competitive edge for both academic and professional pursuits.

NOTES

[1]For a summary of the philosophical evolution of broadcasting curricula, see Robert K. Tiemens, "The Battle for the Broadcasting Curriculum," Western Speech Communication, 39:3 (Summer 1975), 184-190; and Robert K. Avery, "Where We've Been and Where We're Going (or need to go) in Broadcast Education," Public Telecommunications Review, 3:4 (July/August 1975), 32-35. A recent collection of articles which provide an excellent introduction to the area of mass communication education are contained in Communication Education, 27:1 (January 1978).

[2]John R. Bittner, "Research Training in Undergrad Broadcasting Curricula," Western Speech (Winter 1974), 36-40.

[3]Joseph C. Philport and Robert E. Balon, "A Survey of Research Dimensions in Radio-TV-Film Curricula," a paper presented at the 1977 BEA annual meeting, Washington, D. C.

[4]At the time of this writing, a new introductory text is being mailed to broadcast educators: Saundra Hybels and Dana Ulloth. Broadcasting: An Introduction to Radio and Television. New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1978. This text also contains two chapters dealing with research topics; Chapter 7, "Ratings," and Chapter 8, "Broadcasting Research."